15: Nakane E-5 (1955-1956) 1967 AR7 Khasi AR7

602
621

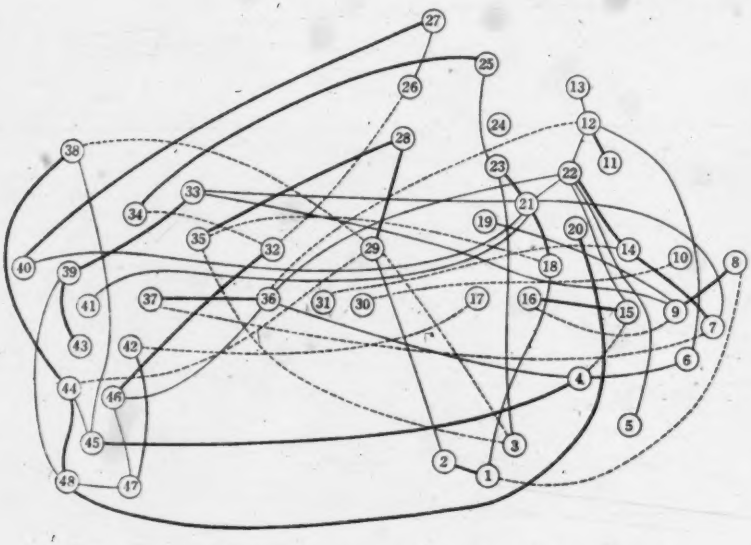

FIG. 10. — *Kinship and Household Location in Sohkynduh.*
——— Matrilineal kinships relations among household-owners;
——— Affinal relations (direct) among household-members;
- - - - - Affinal relations (indirect) among household-members.

particular two families are not restricted to one, but may be accumulated two or three, though I omitted to indicate these in Fig. 10.

582
591
61
621
628

There are some extensions of marriage relations with members outside the village. In Sohkynduh, out of 88 (48 houseowners and 40 their husbands) 13 men and 2 women came from neighbouring villages. Owing to the predominant uxorilocal arrangement, those who came in from outside the village were mostly men. By these members, five different *kur*, new to Sohkynduh, were found, as shown in List 7 (17-21). Most of these outsiders came from villages inside the Kadashinong, or villages no further than a day's journey there and back. This area might be called a secondary endogamous area, and includes more than half a dozen villages. In Kongton, 20 husbands and 3 women came from neighbouring villages by their marriages. The secondary endogamous areas of Kongton and of Sohkynduh are not the same but they overlap in certain places, the surrounding areas being centred on each village. There were, by December 1955, no instances of direct marriage between these two villages.

184
582
621

There are a few exceptions to local endogamy, such as those individuals who have become Christians and are educated in towns like Shillong or Cherrapunjee. They usually move to a town, seeking

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Shella

Confederacy forms a more marked endogamous community, through being cut off geographically and economically from the rest of the Khasi, and socially from the neighbouring Hindu people.

The Economy and the People.

Shella lies along the upper part of the Shella River and stretches upwards along the steep slope, looking down towards the Bengal plain. The climate of this part of the hills is considered to be one of the worst in tropical India for human habitation. The Bengal plain, though warmer than this area, is considered more healthy. This border land is the zone of malaria, typhoid, black fever, cholera, etc. None of the Bengalee peasants dare to live in such an area. However, it is the most fertile for products such as betel-nuts, pan-leaves, oranges, bananas and pineapples, and it also produces limestone. These people seem to prefer to settle in this zone and to enjoy its prosperity, at the expense of human lives: every year, especially between March and September, the inhabitants suffer from various fevers and dysentry and other diseaes, many of the weaker facing death.

Before the Partition of India and Pakistan, the products of Shella were carried down the Shella River to Sylhet, one of the biggest centres in East Bengal, which brought unimaginable wealth to the Shella people. Their houses were built by carpenters from Sylhet. The style and structure of these houses were exceptionally elaborate for the Khasi. They purchased vast rice fields in the plain, which used to be cultivated by Bengalee and Garo labourers engaged by them. These Khasi do not themselves know how to cultivate rice fields; they have always been managers or landowners. Their boys used to be sent to high schools and colleges in Sylhet. As a result of their trading with the Bengalee, many of them read and speak fluent Bengalee. There is no difference between their style of clothing and that of the Bengalee, though the women maintain their traditional dress in the Shella style.

They have thus been distinguished from the rest of the Khasi not only geographically, but also economically and culturally. Their personality also differs sharply from the rest of the Khasi. They are very sociable, and quick, a quality lacking among the Khasi of Sohkynduh and Kongton. They are clever enough to deal with strangers. The upland Khasi say Shella people are very cunning. This remark shows one side of these people. They had to be cunning, since they traded with the Sylhet Bengalee who were said to be the most cunning of their race. Their role in the trade and in the history of the modernization of the Hills was considerable. For centuries they represented intellectual Khasi owing to their contact with Hindu civilization, while the Hills remained in darkness. They assumed an important role when the British established an administration in the Hills, and even up to now, many leading Khasi originated from this area: for instance, Lati Hat, the first interpreter of the British Headquarters at Cherrapunjee; Jeebon Roy, who was the first Magistrate among the Khasi; Maham Sing, a lawyer and Member of the Legislative Assembly (the grandson of Jeebon Roy); Nichols Roy, Minister of Health and Prisons of the Assam Government, Member of the Legislative Assembly, and Missionary of the Church of God; R. R. Thomas (brother of Nichols Roy), Principal of the Gauhati University, etc.

Through constant cultural contact with Hindu, and encouraged by their economic prosperity, the Shella Khasi, like the Jaintias, have been much influenced by Hindu culture. However, this does not mean that the people of Shella adopted the Hindu beliefs. Though there is a small Hindu shrine, and some ceremonial elements were borrowed from the Hindu, most of the

15: Nakane E-5 (1955-1956) 1967 AR7 Khasi AR7

people remained non-Hindu in their basic beliefs and social customs. Hindu influences are nevertheless predominant in their culture, especially in their way of living which shows a practical adaptability, somewhat similar to the Japanese acceptance of modern western culture without becoming Christian. In my census of Shella village, the people calling themselves 'Hindu' amount to 40 per cent of the total, but they are the recent converts to the Ramakrishna School which established a missionary station at Shella after the Partition. The Christians constitute 30 per cent of the total, most of them having been converted during the last ten years, as in the case of the Ramachrishna School.[1] The rest remain as they were, of Khasi belief. These conversions to either Ramachrishna or Christianity seem to have been encouraged by the unstable situation of the people resulting from the recent economic depression in this area.

The Partition of India and Pakistan in August 1947, which drew the borderline a few miles south of Shella village, considerably upset village economy by stopping all trade with Bengal, though a limited amount of trade is allowed with local people at the border. Because of this political change, all the produce of Shella gardens is rotting away for lack of markets, while all of the rice fields were taken by Pakistan. Goods now come to Shella only from the uplands, carried upon men's shoulders over the most difficult pass, which makes everything very expensive. Many families have sold their gold and other treasures, and some families are facing starvation.[2]

Concerning the conversion to a new religion, an interesting phenomenon is to be observed. The conversion to Christianity or to Ramakrishna is mostly by individual: I found in my census that the wife and husband often belong to different religions. This is a very different picture from the Garo, among whom I always found that the husband and wife belonged to the same religion: the conversion of the husband to Christianity was always followed by that of the wife. I think this reflects the structural differences which influence the actual relationship between the husband and wife. Among these Khasi, instead of the husband and wife, the maternal uncle and his nephews and nieces are mostly of the same religion. The function of the *iing*, the most important social and religious unit, thus appears also in the conversion to a new religion, stronger than that of a domestic unit.

Intermarriage.

The close economic and cultural contact of the Shella people and the Bengalee is not matched by social contact. The essential barrier between the two peoples is the difference of religion which dominates the entire social order in each society. Though these Khasi were important traders, richer than the neighbouring Hindu peasants, they were considered by the Hindu as outcasts with whom they never shared social activities. Intermarriages were therefore very rare. In Shella village, only two exceptional cases were found in my census:

1. A Khasi woman married to a Gurka (cattle-keeper); they live at Shella Bazaar (Sholap).
2. A Khasi woman has marital relation with a Bengalee medical doctor who has resided at Disong in Shella for six years. He already has a Bengalee

1. These two entirely different missionary activities are competing with each other, and are somewhat related to the political powers within this area.
2. The state government is doing its best to provide them with additional facilities: for example, providing air transport for the transportation of oranges from Shella to Gauhati and Calcutta. However, such arrangements cannot cover the great economic loss suffered by the Shella people.